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AT ROANOKE, VA
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From
Margaret Knudson

LAURA A. AUSTIN, CLERK
BY:  DEPUTY CLERK

To
The Honorable Robert S. Ballou
United States District Judge
Western District of Virginia
210 Franklin Road, SW
Suite 206
Roanoke, VA. 24011-2208

Dear Judge Ballou:

I am writing this letter to share with you what I know about my friend Martin Elling, who I understand has pleaded guilty to one count of obstruction of justice related to his deletion of electronic documents during a federal investigation.

I met Martin 38 years ago, in 1987, when we were both research interns in the German Parliament, in Bonn. Back then he was a graduate student and I had just finished graduate studies. We became good friends immediately, as we were--and still are--alike in many ways: We share a passion for the study of international relations and how the global community might work together to make the world a better place; an understanding of and affinity for German language and culture; and a deep love of travel, even when it puts us outside of our comfort zone. Our summer in Bonn was fun-filled and memorable, replete with weekend trips, adventure, discovery, laughter, and growth.

Martin and I have remained in close contact for the following (nearly) four decades, and this has only served to deepen our friendship, despite the fact that we live in different cities and work in different sectors. Whereas Martin pursued a consulting career that would make good use of his very sharp mind and problem-solving acumen, I have dedicated my life to nonprofit work and my family. For nearly 30 years I have been a development professional, raising funds for 501(c)(3) organizations that seek to address pressing challenges like climate change, global health, women's equality, the threat of weapons of mass destruction, international peace and security, and conservation. Throughout my career, I have benefitted greatly from Martin's advice and guidance, ranging from how to solve conflict in the workplace to how to manage large teams.

Regarding family, Martin has provided moral support and advice throughout my motherhood journey, giving me courage and perspective during difficult times, laughing with me during absurd times, and encouraging me to find that ideal, often elusive path between over-parenting my kids and fostering their independence. Although they don't know it, my children (now adults) have benefitted greatly from his advice to me.

Another aspect Martin and I share is a firm belief that most people are basically good at heart and, given half a chance and an even playing field, can become contributing members of an ever-improving society. He and I have spent countless hours discussing inequality, racism, poverty, sexism, and how to make that arc of the moral universe bend a little more quickly toward justice.

Martin puts his money where his mouth is. He has made donations to nonprofits with missions he believed in, like the Nature Conservancy of New Jersey, where he donated to help improve their good work that protects land and water that support life on Earth, or the Rotary Club in his current home, Bangkok, which provides community service, promotes integrity, advances world understanding, and promotes goodwill and peace. I know he has given to many other nonprofits, schools, and charitable organizations, but he is not one to brag about this or insist that his name be attached to his gift. His joy comes not from recognition, but rather from helping others.

In this and many other, similar ways, Martin made me feel as though he and I were on the same team, one that worked to build a better life for our communities. And Martin's community is global. I have met dozens of his friends from many countries, and to a person they are hard-working, justice-minded people who share his belief that it is up to us to continually work to improve humanity. This is one reason why his good friends have become my good friends over the years.

Finally, Martin is devoted to his own family. He has helped his nieces and nephews purchase homes for their families. He plans Zoom calls and in-person family gatherings, including by sharing menus and party plans with his brother. He is devoted to his stepmother (his own mother died of cancer when he was a young man, and his father passed away about a decade ago) and visits her every year when he is home from Thailand.

Martin and I are great museum goers; in recent visits he has expressed joy whenever he found a museum that might be a good recipient of some of the art he has collected over the years, or a nonprofit that could benefit from receiving his extensive coin or stamp collections. He is about spreading the joy and not about benefitting financially from the many hours he spent acquiring and organizing his collections.

In short, Martin has lived a life of service and philanthropy in the nonprofit arena, and he has spread joy and fostered a tightly knit, good-hearted community in his personal sphere. I feel very lucky to be his friend. I have known no other person that has spread his good fortune so selflessly, and I have been in the fundraising business a long time.

Thank you for considering my letter about Martin's character and life.

Yours truly,



Margaret Knudson

Knudson

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Mail Room

To the Honorable

Robert S. Ballou

U.S. District Judge, Western District VA

210 Franklin Road, SW

Suite 206

24011-000772

Roanoke, VA 24011-2208